

Alcohol: Do you know how much is too much?

By Capt. Lance Thompson
8th Medical Group

If you are like many Americans, you may occasionally drink alcohol. In and of itself, this may not be bad. However, there can be a problem if you drink too much or if you have other factors that may relate to drinking.

Alcohol, even with light to moderate intake, may cause some problems. It interacts poorly with over 150 medications. An alcohol/medicine combination may make operating machinery even more hazardous that it already is.

Some medications, when taken with alcohol, can greatly increase your risk for liver damage. Alcohol and some medicines can even increase your chances of having a dangerous bleeding stomach ulcer. Check with your medical provider or pharmacist before drinking any amount of alcohol if you are taking any prescribed or over-the-counter med-

ications.

Alcohol and pregnancy are another poor mix. Alcohol can cause a host of birth defects, including fetal alcohol syndrome. Babies born with birth defects related to alcohol can have lifelong physical abnormalities, mental impairment and behavior problems. As there has been no “safe” level of drinking set for pregnancy, it is best not to drink alcohol while pregnant or trying to conceive.

Some medical problems may stem from long-term alcohol consumption. Liver disease and pancreatitis, both serious conditions involving your abdominal organs, can stem from over drinking. More than two million Americans are afflicted with liver disease that is directly attributed to drinking. Alcohol also increases the risk of some types of can-



cer. Cancers of the esophagus, mouth, throat, colon and rectum can all occur more frequently with long-term alcohol users.

Finally, most people know about alcohol’s immediate effect on the brain. This intoxicating action can lower inhibition levels and allow people to do things they might not normally do. It can cause “blackouts” where you don’t even remember what your actions were. Long term alcohol consumption can cause permanent problems with the brain, including dementia — a condition of deteriorating mental abilities.

So how do you know if you are drinking too much? The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information has developed a list of questions that can help you determine if you

should cut down:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won’t?
- Do you ever forget what you did while you were drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hangover after you have been drinking?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions you might want to consider cutting down.

The Wolf Pack has a group of experts at the counseling services office who can help. If you have questions about alcohol’s effects, Air Force policies, or need help slowing down, you can contact counseling services at 782-4562. One more way the Med Dawgs can help keep you Fit to Fight!

Kunsan member reflects on Air Force career, family

By Staff Sgt. Ron Simmons
8th Logistics Support Squadron

My career in the United States Air Force was going great. I was stationed at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., in the 310th Fighter Squadron. I was a dedicated crew chief and had a little more than five years in the Air Force. I was very happy with the way things in my life were going.

My wife, our 3-month-old daughter and I were very comfortable with military life. Then one day I received a phone call that would change my life and how I looked at things forever. My father had just returned from a doctor appointment and was diagnosed with chronic emphysema. My father smoked since he was 14 years old and it seemed smoking had finally taken its effect on him. Six months after he found out about the disease, he had to quit work and go on total disability. From then on his health just deteriorated.

Every day I prayed for a miracle and that my father would make it through another day. I realized I could receive a phone call any minute saying my father had passed away. Each day, the uncertainty became increasingly more difficult to handle. My father’s doctor had faxed a letter to my commander stating that my father was terminally ill and my presence was needed at home.

I was at the six-and-a-half-year point when I had to make the hardest decision of my life. On June 14, 1996, two weeks after I sewed on staff sergeant, I chose to separate from the Air Force, despite not having a job or knowing where my family would live, to spend time with my father.

Fortunately, I found work immediately working for my brother in his lawn service business. We were also able to find an apartment. Times were tight financially and we didn’t have the luxury of a steady military income. I continued to work with my brother until I found a job at a pharmacy. After about four weeks, I had all I could take and quit. I then found work as a sheet metal fabricator in an industrial manufacturing

plant. I really didn’t enjoy the job but it put food on the table and kept a roof over our heads. About three months later, Federal Express hired me. The new job provided job satisfaction, but I wasn’t as happy nor gained the same sense of job satisfaction as I experienced in the Air Force.

The best part of the job was that it was only two miles from my parents home, so I was able to see my dad frequently. About eight months later, my father’s health took a turn for the worse. I had gone to see him one morning before work, and he was lying in his bed, sleeping. I just sat there listening to him breathe; I knew his time was short.

On the morning of Jan. 15, 1998, I said my goodbyes. My brother was holding one hand, and I was holding the other, and my mom just stood by his side. My father, Billy Lee Simmons, opened his eyes and looked at us and heard us tell him we loved him, and then he shut his eyes and took his last breath. One thing we had discussed before he died was my returning to the Air Force. My dad was glad I took time off to spend with him before he passed away. We spent hours just sitting and talking and enjoying the time we had together. My father served in the Air Force years ago and as we talked, we discovered that none of the jobs I held measured up to the Air Force. These jobs were just that, jobs, and not a career.

I wanted a career and nobody “on the outside” seemed to care much about me or provided the same job recognition as the Air Force afforded. For me, the civilian workforce lacked job satisfaction, security and work ethics. As a crew chief with nothing more than a high school diploma and Air Force training, I was given enormous responsibility by the Air Force.

I held the life of a pilot and others in my hands. The decisions I made and my technical skill kept them safe



and played a key role in our nation’s defense. You can’t get any better job satisfaction than that.

About a month after my father’s death, I missed the Air Force more and more. I was not very happy with my job anymore, and I was really starting to miss the Air Force. I discussed how I felt with my wife, and she felt the same way.

The next day, I went to the local recruiter and asked back in. I had kept all of my awards, decorations and certificates that I earned during my six year Air Force career. On May 18, 1998, I enlisted back into the Air Force assuming my former rank of staff sergeant. I spent the next two years attaining my 7-skill level, and received many awards along the way.

I finally realized being in the Air Force is the best job and career for me. I have made many decisions in my lifetime, some good and some bad. My decision to temporarily leave the Air Force to spend time with my father was one that I will always be glad I made. However, the decision to come back in the Air Force was also right on the mark.